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General and complete disarmament: observance of environmental norms in the drafting and implementation of agreements on disarmament and arms control

Observance of environmental norms in the drafting and implementation of agreements on disarmament and arms control

Report of the Secretary-General**

Addendum

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** The information contained herein was received after the submission of the main report.

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Replies received from Governments

Cuba

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[9 July 2002]

1. With each passing year, mankind is becoming increasingly aware of the need to protect the environment and is attempting to limit, reduce and reverse the damage which it has caused and continues to cause. In a few weeks time, this issue will be taken up at the highest level at the World Summit on Social Development, which is due to take place in Johannesburg.

2. Military research and development activities are direct or potential sources of damage to the environment.

3. Cuba's strategy for economic and social development provides for the conservation and protection of the environment, in order to ensure its sustainability. The key principles of Cuba's environmental policy are the following:

- The right to a safe environment is a fundamental right of all citizens;
- Citizens have a duty to protect the environment;
- Environmental management is comprehensive and cross-cutting; State agencies and other entities and institutions, society and citizens in general participate in the process in a coordinated manner and in accordance with their respective competencies and capacities.

4. Cuba also has a set of national instruments for the control and management of environmental policy, including the Environmental Act and its complementary legislation, and the Decree Law on Biosecurity.

5. Cuba is a State party to 35 international treaties on the environment or closely related subjects.

6. Cuba considers that the continued existence of a large quantity of nuclear weapons poses a grave threat, not only to the survival of the human species but also to the environment.

7. There is growing concern at the lack of any real progress towards the complete elimination of these weapons. The Conference on Disarmament has still not been able to fulfil the express mandate entrusted to it by the international community and reiterated each year in resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly, which call for negotiations on nuclear disarmament to begin immediately.

8. In contrast, the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction provides a model of how to effect the complete prohibition of this type of weapon of mass destruction. In this connection, Cuba has continued to work towards the implementation of the Convention by strengthening the relevant national institutions and procedures.

9. Cuba has noted with great concern the interruption of the process of strengthening the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction. The negotiations on the draft verification protocol to the Convention, which were held within the framework of the Ad Hoc Group of Governmental Experts, included, inter alia, proposals for protecting the environment in the implementation of the Convention.

10. Nuclear, chemical and biological weapons can all cause irreparable harm to the environment. Cuba therefore believes that the complete elimination of these weapons still offers the best hope for avoiding the effects of their use or of accidental contamination.

11. Measures taken to destroy weapons should, where appropriate, take into account the provisions of international agreements on the environment.

12. States must adopt the administrative regulations or measures necessary to guarantee full implementation of the objectives set out in the resolution of the General Assembly on observance of environmental norms in the drafting and implementation of agreements on disarmament and arms control.

13. Military conflicts result in destruction at every level and the environmental consequences are considerable. All efforts to prevent these conflicts, based on the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, should therefore be supported.

14. There is greater awareness today of the practices and measures needed to promote sustainable social and economic development, although not all countries are

equally well placed to act on that awareness. It is therefore necessary to consistently promote closer international cooperation in the peaceful use of scientific and technical advances, not only with the participation of the States and intergovernmental institutions concerned but also with the contribution of non-governmental organizations.

15. National laws and regulations that are impediments to such international cooperation must be eliminated. Cuba will continue to contribute, through its modest efforts, to observance of environmental norms in the drafting and implementation of agreements on disarmament and arms control.

Panama

[Original: Spanish]
[24 June 2002]

The Republic of Panama is a party to numerous instruments that establish international regimes in the field of the environment. In this connection, Panama recognizes that the use of weapons, both conventional and in particular unconventional, can cause grave and irreversible damage to the environment that is needed for the sustainable development of our countries. It should be recalled that the Republic of Panama does not have an army as such nor does it have any surplus of weapons and explosives. Consequently, these international norms are being observed as part of the general obligations of Panama as a member of the international community and observance is not limited to the sphere of disarmament and arms control. However, the Republic of Panama attaches the utmost importance to finding a solution to the problem of contamination of some areas that were part of the former United States military bases in the country, and especially to the problem of the clean-up of the contamination caused by chemical weapons on the island of San José. Panama is of the view, furthermore, that observance of environmental norms must also be required in all cases where there is some degree of contamination resulting from the use of arms and explosives, even in the absence of any specific agreement on disarmament and/or arms control.